

[2014?]

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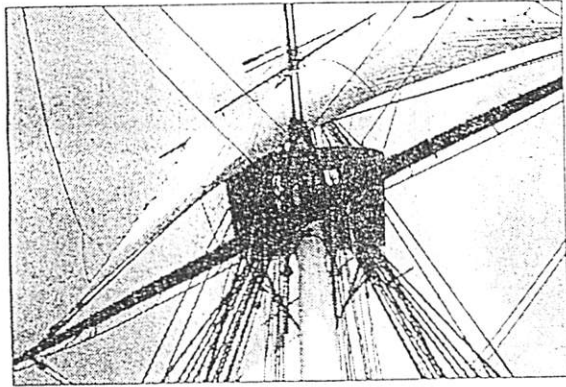
It's been awhile since Old Ironsides last left the calm waters off its Charlestown home — 63 years, as a matter of fact. Since 1934, the USS Constitution has ventured away from its pier only once a year, on July 4, when the ship is traditionally turned around with the help of tugs.

During one historic week, all that will change. The beloved frigate sets out on its bicentennial sail on July 20 and 21, traveling to Marblehead, an appropriate destination given the ship's long association with the seaside community.

In 1814, Old Ironsides was patrolling Massachusetts Bay off Gloucester when two British frigates came into sight further off shore. All three ships approached Halfway Rock, east of Marblehead, where the Constitution pumped the bilge and threw provisions overboard to lighten the vessel and gain speed. Charles Stewart, the ship's captain, turned to Marbleheader Samuel H. Green to pilot the ship around the rocks and into the safety of the harbor. The British pursuers declined to follow and thousands came to stand on the shoreline, man the fort and cheer for the salvation of Old Ironsides.

In celebration of the ship's 200th birthday, Marblehead offers festivities including a performance by the Navy band, a fly-over by the Blue Angels, parties, receptions and more.

In Charlestown, the USS Constitution Museum has planned a week's worth of celebratory activities. On July 21, 23 and 25, "True Tales of USS Constitution," living history performances of heroes and heroines of the frigates past, are held. On July 21, 22 and 24, the museum offers artisan demonstrations and chantey singing. Admission to the USS Constitution Museum and all programs and events are free through Oct. 31 as part of the museum's "Gift to America" program. The USS Constitution Museum, Charlestown, presents Sail Week from July 21-25. Call (617) 426-1812.



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